

Cultural Intelligence and the Marine Corps Intelligence Community

EWS 2005

Subject Area Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence and the Marine Corps Intelligence  
Community

Captain T.M. Ross

Expeditionary Warfare School

Major G.S. Benson

10 January 2005

<b>Report Documentation Page</b>			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
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1. REPORT DATE <b>10 JAN 2005</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2005 to 00-00-2005</b>			
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> <b>Cultural Intelligence and the Marine Corps Intelligence Community</b>			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b>			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> <b>United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068</b>			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b>					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b>					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> <b>12</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the many small crises that simmered during the cold war have begun to boil over. More often than not, these crises will erupt in urban areas in the developing world. Because seventy-five percent of the worlds population lives within one hundred miles of a coast line<sup>1</sup>, the United States Marine Corps will often be called upon to deal with the problems as they arise. As it realized in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Marine Corps will need to rely on cultural experts to assist with the planning and execution of military operations in response to these crises. However, the Marine Corps is not adapting to this need. Because the importance of cultural experts in military operations is only going to grow in the foreseeable future, the Marine Corps needs to fundamentally shift its methodology on recruiting and training cultural experts in order to provide Marine commanders with appropriate cultural intelligence.

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<sup>1</sup> *Littoral Warfare Support by ARINC*, <[http://www.arinc.com/products/naval\\_warfare/littoral\\_warfare.html](http://www.arinc.com/products/naval_warfare/littoral_warfare.html)> (5 February 2005)

## **Understanding Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence seems to have become the latest buzzword and is being bantered around the intelligence and operational communities with alarming frequency. Within the business community, cultural intelligence is used to describe that analysis of a population which attempts to characterize its components and understand the interrelationship between those components<sup>2</sup>. The aim of cultural intelligence in the business world is aimed at increasing the efficiency of a business within in a specific culture and in doing so, increase the profit margin.

Just as the business world uses the cultural intelligence expert to get a "feel" for the market, a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) commander needs access to the same type of expert. This duty falls, rightly so, to the intelligence section. The intelligence officer and his staff are called upon to provide the MAGTF commander with a detailed description of the potential operations area (AO). The intelligence section has many tools at its disposal but they are all directed at describing the physical environment of a conventional engagement. "American armed forces seemingly have the technology, tools and personnel

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<sup>2</sup> This definition is derived from scanning several business training web sites catering to the development of cultural intelligence. The core of the course offerings appears to be directed at understanding the macro aspects of culture in a given country. The second focus is how to effectively function within that specific environment.

available to achieve decision superiority in any (conventional) operation"<sup>3</sup>. While the process and tools to support traditionally Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace (IPB)<sup>4</sup> are sound there is a definite shortfall in detailed information and understanding of cultural impacts that is required before and accurate representation of the situation can be formed.

### **The Importance of Cultural Intelligence**

As the nature of the world changes, so too does the nature of the threat to the United States' national interest. The climate of the world today has resulted in a decrease in the focus on nation states as military opponents, with the possible exception of North Korea and Iran. Because both sides are more likely to opt for a diplomatic resolution, as with Libya in 2004, disputes between nations are less likely. What is on the rise is the threat from non-state actors and intra-nation conflict. The United States Marine Corps will be called upon to respond to these threats. Since the conflicts have roots to culturally significant events or beliefs cultural intelligence will play a critical role.

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<sup>3</sup> Russell W Glenn and Jo Medby Jamison. Street Smart: IPB for Urban Operations. Santa Monica: Rand, 2002, 5

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of the traditional form of Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace refer to FM 34-130. For a more detailed discussion of modifications to the IPB process in order to better portray the urban environment refer to the Rand Publication Street Smart: IPB for Urban Operations.

### **Non-State Actors**

With the relative increase in the ability of the United States to use economic and diplomatic means to influence nations to opt for peaceful resolutions comes a natural decrease in the requirement to compel by force. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of economic and diplomatic power does not extend to the non-state actor. The non-state actor is more motivated by some ideological stance and, as a result, is not swayed by economic or diplomatic pressure. In fact because there is little direct pressure that the United States can place upon the non-state actor, it instead has to apply pressure militarily or upon nation states known to support the specific opponent.

Since the economic and diplomatic means are effectively eliminated as options in influencing non-state actors the military and information arms of national power must be relied upon to fulfill this task. When addressing an ideological opponent an understanding of his culture is critical. The Marine Corps recognized the importance of understanding an opponent's culture and codified it in the Small Wars Manuel, noting that it is of primary importance that the fullest benefit be derived from the psychological aspects of the situation. In order to derive this benefit a serious study of the people,

their racial, political, religious and mental development must be undertaken<sup>5</sup>.

### **Cultural Intelligence and the Marine Corps Intelligence Community**

The Marine Corps intelligence community is required to provide the MAGTF commander with accurate and timely cultural intelligence. Although this intelligence is usually provided as part of the IPB process, currently a limitation exists. The Marine Corps intelligence community does not have the cultural experts or tools necessary to accurately portray the cultures resident in the MAGTF AO.

The intelligence section often attempts to quickly assimilate all available information on a particular area in an effort to bring the commander and staff an accurate depiction of what to expect upon arrival. Normally the intelligence section is able to provide a high level of detail with regard to the terrain and conventional forces. Much of this is the result of having access to national and theater intelligence collection systems and analysis. Because of increased urbanization and the focus on non-state actors the technological edge held by the United States is becoming irrelevant<sup>6</sup>. "The sheer density and

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<sup>5</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* FMFRP 12-15 (Washington, D.C. GPO, 1940), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Glenn, 5

diversity of all features in and urban area often make information superiority impossible"<sup>7</sup>. It is not so much a question of the quantity of information as it is the ability to filter the volumes of information.

The majority of intelligence analysis conducted in the operating forces is done by company grade officers and junior enlisted Marines. Few, if any, of these Marines have any formal training in cultural intelligence. There currently is not a formal entry level cultural intelligence training program in the Marine Corps for either enlisted Marines or officers. The focus is on developing the basic skills necessary to operate in their assigned fields. There is a program aimed at midlevel offices. The foreign area officer (FAO) and regional area officer (RAO) programs are an attempt to develop a cadre of officers with cultural expertise for future assignments within the operating force. However, the selections to these programs are limited and participants are taken from throughout the entire Marine Corps, not just the intelligence community. The FAO/RAO coded billets reside on the MEF staff and not the intelligence battalions or in the intelligence sections where they IPB is conducted. The problem arises that the person who has the knowledge about a particular culture is separated from the people tasked with providing the commander the potential impacts

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<sup>7</sup> Glenn, 5

of that culture on future operations. To further compounds this problem these billets are often left vacant.

There is obviously a need for cultural experts within the operating forces and because the IPB is conducted within the intelligence section, it is only logical that the majority of cultural experts be located there. However, this does not mitigate the necessity for this type of expertise throughout the MAGTF. Every unit that is capable of operating independently during a Military Operation Other Than War (MOOTW) situation has a legitimate reason to request a cultural expert assigned to it. However, actual staffing of every battalion with a cultural expert is impractical since there is a wide range of countries that the battalion may operate within and an even larger number of cultures within those countries.

At a minimum, there should cultural experts resident in the MEF G-2, the Division G-2, and the MEU S-2. There should also be a group of cultural experts resident in the intelligence battalion's all-source fusion platoon. The cultural experts assigned to the all-source fusion platoon should form the core of the country teams and be comprised of both officer and enlisted Marines. When a MAGTF is deployed, these cultural experts could be deployed to augment its intelligence section. These Marines can also provide the necessary support to the

operational planning teams that have been formed through the MEF.

### **Cultural Intelligence Tanglefoot**

While cultural intelligence is important, it is not cheap. To develop someone who is well-verses in the nuances of a specific culture, an organization has to invest a considerable amount of time and money. One only needs to look at the Department of State as an example. It takes years of schooling, training and experience to develop truly competent diplomats. In order for the Marine Corps to develop a cadre of competent cultural intelligence experts, it needs to take a fundamentally new approach to recruitment, training and retention programs aimed at the intelligence community.

Even if the Marine Corps was to invest in developing cultural experts, the risk exists that they would depart the service at the end of their contract. This problem, while a possibility, exists just as equally in other military occupational specialties. For example, a considerable investment of time and money is allocated to the development of naval aviators. As a result, pilots are required to make increased service commitments and receive incentives to remain in the military. This incentive system is functioning reasonable well with the Marine Corps retaining a core of

experienced aviators. There is no reason that this system could not be adapted to retain a core of cultural experts.

The Marine Corps also runs the risk of investing in the wrong types of cultural experts. It is safe to assume that there will be a requirement for Middle Eastern experts for the next ten years, but, beyond, that, it is hard to predict. The trick is to look forward five to ten years and envision where the crisis de jour will be, then start building cultural experts today. It is not an easy problem to address, but it is one that is not going to get better with time or procrastination.

When looking at developing a cadre of cultural experts there are two ways the Marine Corps can progress; it can make them or it can buy them. If the Marine Corps decides to create this cadre of experts from within, it needs to identify them early on and lock them into an initial contract that would cover the training time as well as utilization time. This would also need to be followed up with an attractive incentive program to encourage retention. If the Marine Corps determines that the cost of internal training is too high, then it can always outsource the experts once a determination of the projected need is made. Outsourcing would reduce the cost the Marine Corps would pay for initial training and the maintenance of the cultural skill and would allow for a more responsive shift in cultural experts throughout the force. The most flexible and

responsive route would be to outsource the necessary cultural experts. Since the Marine Corps has typically responded to the small wars that spring up unexpectedly it must remain flexible in all aspects to include the supply of cultural experts.

### **Conclusion**

Cultural experts and the cultural intelligence they provide are critical to success on the current battlefield. They dynamics of recent conflicts require commanders to have a better understanding of the nuances of the various cultures within their area of operations. As a result, there is a greater stress placed on the cultural intelligence aspect of the IPB process. In order for the intelligence section to provide an accurate and relevant picture to the commander, it needs a cultural expert who is well-versed in that population's culture. While currently no formal cultural expert exists in the intelligence sections of the operating forces, if the Marine Corps is to continue to be a flexible and formidable force in the future, it needs to invest in cultural experts either from within its own ranks or from the civilian population.

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